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PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY: *THE NEGLECTED GENIUS*

ABSTRACT. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) is considered one of the most prolific poets and, at the same time, the most tragic icon of the Romantic Movement in England. His life and poetry certainly support such argument because Shelley's joy, his love of mankind, intense feelings, imagination, love, freedom, and a profound belief in the perfection of man are unique among all Romantics. This paper gives an outlook of his life, times, critical reception, and his most famous works, which are recognized as leading expressions of his incredible, and, oftentimes, neglected poetic genius.

KEYWORDS: Percy Bysshe Shelley; poetry; love; imagination; freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Percy Bysshe Shelley belonged to the younger generation of the English Romantic poets whose sensitive aestheticism, intense passions, political radicalism, and tragically short lives rose them to fame. In fact, Shelley's life and work unquestionably support such a

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perception. His joy, faith in humanity, imagination, intense feelings, love and perfection of man are unique among his peers. Shelley's poetic genius is deeply rooted in his profound understanding of and a distinctively philosophical relationship with each of these thematic concerns mostly because of his firm belief that the power of poetry could change the world. Nevertheless, there was an apparent dark side to him as well and those moments of darkness and despair oftentimes stem from his deep disappointment at seeing that this ideal vision of man, poetry and the world is unconditionally surrendering to human weakness.

To understand the complexity of Shelley's poetry, one must first understand that the poet's role in Shelley's poetic philosophy is not that of an entertainer, but that of a magnificent and tragic figure who has a deep understanding and appreciation of nature (as in the short poem *To Wordsworth* (1816)) which gives him access to subtle cosmic truths (as in *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude* (1816)). That is why his poetry is some sort of prophecy where the poet acquires the ability to change the world for the better and to bring about changes in every single aspect of life: political, social, and spiritual. Therefore, Shelley's poet becomes a savior (like Prometheus and/or Christ), who is oftentimes sentenced to abominable suffering caused by many external factors such as critics, a tyrannical government, conventional religion, and middle-class hypocritical values. Despite these hardships, the poet almost always triumphs because his art is immortal and it outlasts the tyranny of government, religion, and society, and he lives on to inspire new generations.

UNDERSTANDING SHELLEY THE MAN

To understand Shelley's poetry, one needs to understand Percy Shelley the man. He was born in Horsham, educated at Oxford but his college years did not last long. In 1811, he was expelled from Oxford together with Thomas Jefferson Hogg (who was most certainly his lover at the time) over a radical pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* in which the two fellow students questioned the existence of God. This event further alienated him from his family and left him without any financial means but it did not stop him to elope with Harriet Westbrook – a 19-year old intelligent, mannerly and beautiful young woman – who was willing to sacrifice everything

for him. From 1811 until 1814, Shelley and Harriet actively participated in political and social reforms in Ireland and Wales, and Shelley wrote many radical pamphlets in which he manifested his views on liberty, equality and justice. Although he was a radical proponent of free love, who did not believe in marriage, Shelley married Harriet in 1814 only to legally secure their children. Nevertheless, he fell in love with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin a few weeks later. Even though, Harriet refused to join their union as “a sister”, he continued to support her and their two children. In the fall of 1816, two years after Shelley had abandoned her, Harriet committed suicide by drowning. His desire to respect the memory of Harriet was shattered when he was forced to marry Mary, who threatened him with suicide if he did not. During this period, he also lost custody of his children with Harriet. By citing Shelley’s poem *Queen Mab* in which he openly rejected social norms and religion in favor of free love and atheism, the Westbrooks convinced the court that the children would be unsafe in his custody and so Shelley lost yet another battle against the government and legislation (Bakić-Mirić, 2011, p. 10).

In 1818, the Shelleys relocated to Italy in fear of losing custody of their own two children and motivated by Shelley’s deteriorating health and financial worries. There, he rekindled his friendship with Byron (the friendship that actually began through Claire Claremont, Mary’s stepsister and Byron’s lover who gave birth to one of his children). They famously spent the summer of 1816 at Byron’s house on Lake Geneva where Mary conceived the idea for her critically acclaimed short novel “Frankenstein”. Incidentally, Shelley’s life in Italy and his frequent attendance of the Italian opera had also left a mark in his ‘Italian’ poetic period and his masterpiece *Prometheus Unbound*, respectively.

The Shelleys lived in Italy until Percy’s untimely death in a boating accident near Lerici in 1822 that was largely caused by his volatile nature. Perhaps there was no more appropriate ending for such an erratic persona consumed by the search for perfection and social acceptance. Shelley’s body was cremated on the beach in Lerici. The legend says that his heart was left intact in the funeral pyre (interpreted by many as a symbol of eternal love), and given to Mary to keep it safe wrapped in the manuscript of *Adonais* – one of Shelley’s most beautiful pastoral elegies written in honor of his fellow poet John Keats after his untimely death (Bakić-Mirić, 2011, pp. 13-21).

SHELLEY'S POETIC GENIUS RECONSIDERED

In 1810, before the age of twenty Shelley had already published two Gothic novels, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* and two collections of poems, *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire* and *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* co-authored with Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Between 1812 and 1821, Shelley wrote *An Address to the Irish People* (1812) arguing for religious emancipation; *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough* (1812) his most significant early literary work about the freedom of speech and judicial corruption; a pamphlet on the death penalty *On the Punishment of Death* (1815) where Shelley envisions the punishment of death as the usurpation of a poetic design; *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom* (1817), a fragment where he discusses reforms in England; and tragedy *The Cenci* (1818), an intensely tragic gothic melodrama about incest and patricide set in Italy and based on a true story about Count Cenci.

The year 1818 also generated a weak poem *Rosalind and Helen* in which Shelley shows the plight of women under the traditional and conventional laws and customs of marriage, *Julian and Maddalo* a very strong philosophical poem, and *Ozymandias* (1818), a short poem in which Shelley represents the liaison between an extremely tyrannical rule and derogated environment. In 1819, Shelley wrote an anti-capitalist pamphlet *Philosophical View of Reform* in which he openly stated that political and economic reforms were crucial for the reformation of the whole society and called for upheaval and necessity to install democracy. In the same year, Shelley wrote a somewhat bizarre satire *Peter Bell the Third* about William Wordsworth, who in his later years became an open supporter of the British monarchy, and *Oedipus Tyrannus or, Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820) a mock tragedy on the British royal family (Bakić-Mirić, 2011, pp. 22-36).

The Witch of Atlas (written in 1820) is a long poem about wandering imagination, incredible sense of beauty and perfection of nature, that is often considered one of Shelley's best longer poems though at moments quite uninteresting. Shelley's last unfinished poem *The Triumph of Life* (1821) shows a grim quest for love, beauty, freedom and the meaning of life in which he worships intellectual beauty and celebrates surreal love of life that triumphs over everything (Hogson 1975, pp. 595-622).

His masterpiece essay *A Defence of Poetry*, written in 1821, postulates that poetry initiates good morals and elicits imagination as the source of sympathy, compassion, and love. This brings humanity closer to the ideal of *Intellectual Beauty*, which is a symbol that epitomizes the power of poetic imagination. In the same year, enthralled by powers of the human mind and poetic imagination, Shelley wrote *Mont Blanc* (1816-1817), which was in his own words “composed under the immediate impression of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe”. In this long poem, Shelley compares the power of nature and the human mind and he calmly, skeptically acknowledges the limits of the human understanding of the larger power of nature, turning to the issue of how the human mind can come to terms with something having such a huge, silent power (Hutchinson, 1997, p. 125).

In a manner relatable to his readings of Plato, it is quite evident that love was *perpetuum mobile* for Shelley whether as an ideal in *Epypsichidion* (1821) or simply as a short effusion in *On Love* (1815). The years 1816 and 1817 produced *The Revolt of Islam or Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City* (1816-1817). In this long poem, two main protagonists Laon and Cythna lead a revolution against the despotic ruler of the fictional state of Argolis. Despite its title, the poem has nothing to do with Islam. It is mostly spiritual and represents a symbolic parable on hypocrisy of the time and the disillusionment of the French Revolution.

Prometheus Unbound (1818-1820) – a cosmic play in four acts (composed in Rome) embodies Shelley's thoughts about life, death and absolution. Prometheus (the human mind, will and forethought) has turned against himself the god of all heaven – Jupiter, who, not only chains and torments him but also oppresses humanity. Shelley believed that this anthropomorphic god of religion, who enslaves both the mind and the body, is the actual creation of the human mind. Prometheus (or the Human Mind), who is separated from Asia (Nature and Love), protests against and curses the self-enthroned nemesis. Once Prometheus revokes his curse and turns hate into pity, Jupiter is already symbolically overthrown. However, the damnation (although lifted by Prometheus in the act of self-realization in Act I) takes place in Act III: Demogorgon (or Necessity) banishes Jupiter to eternal void. Prometheus is then unbound and the human mind is symbolically liberated and reunited with his spouse Asia (Nature and Love), and the world of man transitions from downfall and degradation into limitless perfec-

tion. This vision actually represents Shelley's vision of the future in which love and imagination work together to renew the world and harmonize the universe (Watson, 1987; Bloom, 1969).

Shelley's revolutionism is clearly evident in his anti-royalist poems such as *Devil's Walk* (1812) in which he fiercely attacks the King and public officials; *The Masque of Anarchy* (1819) where he attacks the Royals and the government for the Peterloo massacre, and *England 1819* which represents a fierce attack on the corrupt English monarchy. A fairy-tale poem *Queen Mab* (1817) reaffirms Shelley's political views on democracy and history as he tries to comprehend the ideas of Rousseau, Godwin, Beckon and Spinoza.

After many disappointments in somewhat pessimistic *Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples* (1818), Shelley compares the sea with his own grieving, empty heart in the cruel world which he is surrounded by. In *Ode to the West Wind* (1820), the poet calls the West wind of change (America) to wreck havoc in Europe and bring 'spring' of political freedom whereas in *To the Cloud* (1820) Shelley symbolically worships the cloud as the symbol of freedom. Interestingly, he almost always ends his revolutionary poems with hope for freedom in all spheres of life (Bakić-Mirić, 2011, pp. 23-36). This vision of free world is also seen in drama *Hellas* (1821) in which tyranny disappears in time cycles that almost always lead to change. The central character in the drama is Sultan Mahmud, who is leading Turkish attacks against Greece. His recurring nightmare that Constantinople is destroyed (despite Consistent Turkish victories on the battlefield) forces him to seek help from the Wandering Jew – Ahasuerus – to interpret it and reassure him that the Turks will be victorious. Alternating between the three dialogues is a chorus of the Greek enslaved women who represent the voice of hope and freedom. The drama is actually the expression of a universalized view of the futility of war and it is not directly connected to the Greek uprising but freedom fights in general. On the symbolical level, *Hellas* can be interpreted as America or Hellas of new hope where the revolutionaries were inspired by a new spirit of idealism and democracy and won their freedom forever (Bakić-Mirić, 2011, pp. 83-103).

Shelley wrote many short lyric poems: *Ode to the Skylark*, *To the Cloud*, *To Mary*, *Music When Soft Voices Die*, *When the Lamp is Shattered* etc., which represent a lasting legacy of the poet who was surely one of the most remarkable among the Romantics in every way: bold, courageous, rebellious and not easily intimidated. His views

on universal suffrage, revolution and political reforms seemed, especially in early years, the only method of regenerating the society. Moreover, Shelley rejected rationalism and Enlightenment because he firmly believed that nature, love and the power of imagination would transform the world and spiritually regenerate humanity in the future.

CRITICS AND A BEAUTIFUL AND INEFFECTUAL ANGEL

Ever since Shelley's first published poetic work, his critical reputation has been characterized by extremities. During his lifetime, his work was panned by the critics because of atheism and incomprehensible philosophy. His personal life and widespread rumors did him no favor either. Those few admirers such as Leigh Hunt, Hasel-foot and Thomas Love Peacock who came to realize his poetical talents were at the same time accountable for hindering his acclamation by associating him with highly detested Cockney School discredited by the likes of John Gibson Lockhart in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Redpath, 1973). Matthew Arnold, who was a well-respected critic of the time, famously described Shelley as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel", and thought of Shelley as a poetic dilettante who had no serious intellectual capabilities and whose longer poems were not worth studying.

In the late nineteenth century, Shelley was mostly ignored by the critics. However, in the Victorian age, Shelley was regarded as a poet of ideal love, and he became a perfect fit for the Victorian idea of the poet - a sensitive and misunderstood genius. Unfortunately, in the early twentieth century his works fell into disfavor again for the same reasons: vague imagery, nebulous philosophy, reckless technique and, most of all, his assumed intellectual and emotional immaturity.

In the late 1930s and after, Shelley's poetry became critically acclaimed again as some critics recognized the complexity of his philosophy and poetic thought, poetic imagery, use of language and technical achievements.

For instance, Bowra considers Shelley the best philosopher among poets whose main contribution lies "among the chief springs of his creative activity were ideas that most men find remote and impersonal, but which had for him a peculiarly vivid appeal. He was enough a philosopher not merely to enjoy ideas for

their own sake but to make them a starting point for bold speculations in he found thrills of a wild adventure” (Bowra, 1973, p. 103).

J. R. Watson, a renowned critic of Shelley and the Romantic era in general, argues that the main reason some critics rather choose to ignore him and/or write negative reviews of his works is that Shelley's poetry is difficult to understand:

“In the first place, it contains a very considerable amount of Shelley's voluminous reading – philosophical, scientific, mythological, religious and political. Secondly, it frequently attempts to describe that which is beyond description – a depth beyond depth, a height beyond height, a timelessness beyond time, a boundless space, all the features of the universe which we can stretch to imagine but cannot satisfactorily find words to compass. Thirdly, it is a poetry which moves with great speed; its characteristic effects are not those of logic or fixed clarity, but of changing sensibility confronting an ever-changing world.” (Watson, 1987, p. 225)

Moreover, Rayan focuses on the difficulties of Shelley's modes of discourse and the relation between text and subtext of his works. To explain this correlation, Rayan points to the following difficulties in understanding Shelley's poetic discourse:

“Between his early use of sentimental rhetoric in *Alastor* and his later use in of it there, he (Shelley) has confronted the limits of idealism in *Mont Blanc*. Hence, whereas *Alastor* seems to repress its own ironies, *Prometheus Unbound* seems rather to defy them in the belief that the reader, too, will discover a commitment to the sacred necessity of hope ... As there are two levels of discourse ... the one that discloses the hesitation about the power of poetry to reconstitute reality by creating a second one that represents power of Intellectual Beauty.” (Rayan, 1986, p. 95)

Frederick A. Pottle disagrees with the commonly held view that Shelley was ignored during his lifetime but he was rather thought of as a poet of great but misguided powers. Pottle believed that contemporary critics misinterpret Shelley's poems – firstly, because they did not like them and secondly, they had a negative perception of them:

“I wish modern criticism would spend less time in prescription and more in calm, patient, neutral description. Though our judgments of the value of Shelley's poems are bound to vary widely and unpredictably, all critics of all periods ought ideally to be able to describe his poems in the same way: ought to be able to say “The structure of thought of this poem is so-an-so” or “The metaphors of this poem are

such-and-such” ... All accomplished poetry requires close reading and Shelley’s is especially difficult. The danger the New Critics run is that of not taking Shelley seriously enough.” (Pottle, 1971, p. 47)

One of Shelley’s great admirers of the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis claims that the general dislike of Shelley in the twentieth century is due to his profound belief in perfectibility of man which is unimaginable in the modern world:

“Shelley is silly in the modern sense to believe ludicrously well of the human heart in general and crudely ill of a few tyrants to be, in a word, insufficiently disillusioned.” (Lewis, 1972, p. 333)

Lewis postulates that the main problem with accepting Shelley as a great poet is largely because he has always been considered an immature and silly poet not only because of Matthew Arnold who coined a phrase *ineffectual angel* but also because of Eliot who claimed that Shelley is *unreadable in maturity*.

In Ridenour's opinion, Shelley is unacceptable by modern critics because his poetry is mostly focused on utopianism and modern world has simply grown tired of it:

"This is Shelley's utopianism and it does not seem to me strictly a defense of Shelley to point out that when we examine his utopian utterances carefully we find that they are in various ways qualified. He works to make the biggest statement he can, to claim the most for man that he is good, but at his most characteristic the statement is circumscribed: the paradise is a limited one or he fails to achieve it or collapses after having been achieved. His hopes are infinite, but he is sober in expectation." (Ridenour, 1987, p. 3)

Fogle claims that Shelley’s poetry is difficult to digest because he uses pictures from everyday life and turns them into abstractions, which is quite confusing for an ordinary reader. He uses ordinary symbols (such as lyre, brook, boat, cloud) and turns them into confusing metaphors:

“Shelley's images are not lifeless pawns in a game of philosophic chess. They are living, flexible, various in the subtle shades of meaning, which attach to them. Reflecting consistent view of life, each image is nevertheless a response to a particular poetic stimulus and situation dictated by a thousand considerations of mood, tone and artistic necessity and aspiration toward heights which he did not, as some would have conceived as easy of attainment, but which he felt to be inexpressibly have, conceive as easy attainment, but which he

felt to be inexpressibly enchanting through the very difficulty of scaling them.” (Fogle, 1987, p. 29)

Perhaps, it was Harold Bloom who best explained Shelley’s power of thought and his incredible poetic genius as well why it was misunderstood by some modern critics:

“Shelley and his modern critic may sit together from dawn to gloom, watching yellow bees in the ivy by the light of the lake-reflected sun. At day's end the critic, if he has the talents of a naturalist, might be able to turn out a more accurate description of the bees than Shelley could, but Shelley, never heeding or seeing bees, may have created from them a form 'more real' - that is perceived with greater imaginative intensity - than a living man himself.” (Bloom, 1969, p. 115)

In conclusion to this part, Shelley is considered the poet of the future by many modern critics. He appeared at the time after the French revolution had drained the agility of men and left them intellectually impotent. As a humanist and a liberal Shelley secured a place in such a society of a poet-reformer, who was willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of humanity by uniting what was at first glance unimaginable - theoretical ardor and humanitarian zeal.

A LOST ANGEL IN (HETEROSEXUAL) PARADISE - A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF SHELLEY’S LIFE AND POETRY

In a recently published paper, John Lauritsen (2013, p. 359) suggested that Shelley’s life had been altered and falsified by Mary Shelley and his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Shelley in their attempt to transform pagan, free, and romantic Shelley into a something that he abhorred—a Victorian angel “suitable for enshrinement among the gods of respectability and convention” (Smith 194, p. 150). According to Lauritsen, the two women destroyed pages from his diaries, manuscripts, and letters to such an extent that an accurate biography of Shelley cannot be composed.

As early as 1925, a gay pioneer Edward Carpenter in his book “The psychology of the poet Shelley” noticed that Shelley’s relationships with women were unhappy whereas his attachment to his male friends was warm and faithful. In Carpenter’s opinion

although Shelley's poetry was mostly occupied by love it occurs almost always in abstract form and his female characters seem distant and sexless (Carpenter and Barnefield, 2010, p. 75).

Interestingly, he was married (twice) with children but there was little evidence that he was actually erotically attracted to women. He was forced into both marriages by women and he was apparently unhappy in both. According to Lauritsen (2013), this is one of the reasons to interpret Shelley's unhappiness as that of a gay man trapped in a heterosexual marriage.

For instance, in a letter Shelley wrote to his friend Hogg in 1814 he lamented: "I saw the full extent of the calamity which my rash and heartless union with Harriet ... had produced. I felt as if a dead and living body had been linked together in loathsome and horrible communion" (Jones, 1964, pp. 150). In addition, Shelley's forced marriage to Mary Godwin—who, according to Lauritsen, manifested her own lesbianism after his premature death—was unhappy. Shelley's biographers claim that he slept on the sofa and avoided Mary for at least two years of their marriage.

Nonetheless, Shelley's one great and true love was Thomas Jefferson Hogg who was expelled from Oxford together with him at the age of 18 over *The Necessity of Atheism*. The two boys briefly lived in London together before their separation induced by their families. Nowhere in Shelley's poetic work can such passionate writing be found as in his letters to Hogg in which he declares his love for him as well as sadness because of their separation:

"You have chosen me, and we are inseparable ... Are you not whom I love? ... If I thought we were to be long parted, I should be wretchedly miserable – half mad! ... Will you come; will you share my fortunes, enter into my schemes, love me as I love you, be inseparable, as once I fondly hoped we were? ... Oh, How I have loved you! I was even ashamed to tell you how! ... Why did I leave you? I have never doubted you – you, the brother of my souls, the object of my vivid interest; the theme of my impassioned panegyric." (Jones, 1964, pp. 91-3)

Another indication of their love and a possible sexual experience can be found in *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*:

"SOFT, my dearest angel stay,
Oh! Suck my soul away;
Suck on, suck on, I glow, I glow!
Tides of maddening passion roll,
And streams of rupture drown my soul.

Now give me one more billing kiss,
 Let your lips now repeat the bliss,
 Endless kisses steal my breath,
 No life can equal such a death.”

(Hutchinson, 1997, p. 95)

According to Lauritsen (2013, p. 365) after a very intense act of love making in which “maddening passion roll(s)”, “lips repeat the bliss”, and “endless kisses steal breath” finally comes ‘death’ which is a metaphor of orgasm. This stanza clearly indicates that Hogg and Shelley were experimenting with sex during their Oxford days.

As far as Shelley’s relationship with Byron is concerned, it is no secret that they were lovers at some point. In a recently uncovered memoir written by Claire Clairmont, the two poets were described as “monsters of lying, meanness, cruelty and treachery” whom she accused of ruining lives, including her own (Hay, 2010, p. 45). This new revelation insinuates that Claire had a child with Shelley and was also impregnated and then abandoned by Byron. She wrote: “Under the influence of the doctrine and belief of free love, I saw the two first poets of England ... become monsters” (Hay, 2010, p. 46). Dr. Hay, who discovered the memoir, said: “Nowhere else did Claire explicitly accuse Shelley of cruelty, or reveal so minutely the dark underside of Romantic living. Nothing else quite like it survives. One might expect Claire to write about Byron in this manner, but her attack on Shelley is more unexpected.” (Hay, 2010, p. 1) Claire also wrote that she hoped her memoir would show “what evil passion free love assured, what tenderness it dissolves; how it abused affections that should be solace and balm of life, into a destroying scourge.” (Hay, 2010, p. 47)

In Claire’s own words, “the worshipers of free love not only preyed upon others but also on themselves, turning their existence into a perfect hell.” Their “preying” on one another can be interpreted as an intense sexual relationship between the two poets who spent a lot of time together in Italy. As a result, *Julian and Maddalo* an autobiographical and somewhat problematic work came out. In this poem, there are three characters: Julian (Shelley), Count Maddalo (Byron), and Maniac (a shadow ghost). By Shelley’s own interpretation in the Introduction to the poem, Shelley himself says that he has no information of who Maniac is. According to him, he or she is someone disappointed in life, a very cultivated and amiable person, who was abandoned by his or her lover.

Throughout the poem, Shelley makes bittersweet homosexual allusions:

“Tis strange men change not. Your were ever still
 Among Christ’s flock a perilous infidel,
 A wolf for the meek lambs – if you can’t swim
 Beware of Providence. I looked on him,
 But the gay smile had faded in his eye.”

(Hutchinson 1997, p. 155)

It is easily noted that Shelley uses the word ‘gay’ to make hints that Byron’s and his relationship was not purely platonic. He also hints that “these strange men change not” (or gay men) and they will always be “among Christ’s flock a perilous infidel” (condemned by the society) who will always have to hide their sexuality because “if you can’t swim” (hide sexual orientation) you will have to “beware of Providence” (severe punishment). The last line in this stanza is their realization that they can never come out as gay because they will be condemned and banished by the society and that is why “the gay smile had faded in his eye”, and he realized that homosexuality will never be accepted by the society.

Further in the poem, Julian and Maddalo sail to the island to visit the Maniac who is Maddalo’s acquaintance. The two alleged “lovers” listen to his long soliloquy in which he clearly and unmistakably refers to male love, which is unnamable sin or “the love that dare not speak its name”. Interestingly, the Maniac speaks about how he has to “wear his mask of falsehood even to those/who are most dear” referencing to the impossibility of coming out as gay even to people who are close to him. The Maniac further associates same-sex love with “the dungeon, shame and the scaffold”. He is so unhappy that he wants to die:

“Heap on me soon,
 O grave, why welcome dust!
 Till then the dungeon may demand prey,
 And Poverty and Shame may meet and say –
 Halting beside me on the public way –
 That love-doted youth is ours – let’s sit
 Beside him – he may live some six months yet.

Or the scaffold, as our country bends,
May ask some willing victim ...”

(Hutchinson, 1997, p. 157)

As Lauritsen (2013, p. 365) points out ‘shame’ is a gay code word, which means a state of dishonor and awareness of guilt of being different while ‘scaffold’ and ‘our country’ refer to England where men and boys were punished by hanging for being gay. Most probably, the Maniac personifies suffering of all gay men who are unjustly scorned and persecuted for being different.

The last male love in Shelley’s life was Edward E. Williams. Shelley depicted their relationship in the happiest poem he had ever written “The Boat on the Serchio” (published in part by Mary Shelley in “Posthumous Poems” in 1824) in which we see two lovers Melchior and Lionel as personifications of Shelley and Edward and the boat represents their relationship (magnificent, stable and beautiful). They are apparently very fond of each other. At one point Shelley says:

“They from the throng of men had stepped aside,
And made their home under the green hill-side.”

(Hutchinson, 1997, p. 447)

The two men “had stepped aside” meaning that they decided not to hide their sexuality and “made their home under the green hill-side” that is, they started living together and shared bed together. In the final stanza, Shelley admits that their relationship is sexual:

“The Serchio, twisting forth
between the marble barriers which it clove
At Ripafratta, leads through the dread chasm
The wave that died the death which lovers love,
Living in what it sought; as if this spasm
Had not yet passed, the toppling mountains cling,
But the clear stream in full enthusiasm
Pours itself on the plain ...”

(Hutchinson, 1997, p. 449)

The “death which lovers love”, “the spasm”, “the clear stream”, “in full enthusiasm pours itself on the plain” is clearly an orgasm.

According to Lauritsen (2013, p. 370) this stanza may be the best portrayal of orgasm in world literature.

Incidentally, Shelley and Williams died together in a boating accident near Lerici in 1822. Shortly before their untimely death, Shelley had written an epitaph in which he expressed a sexual desire for Williams. This epitaph clearly shows how close and sexually intense their relationship was:

“They were two friends, whose life was undivided.
So let them mingle. Sweetly they had glided
Under the grave. Let not their dust be parted,
For their two hearts in life were single-hearted.”

(Hutchinson, 1997, p. 449)

It is a well-known fact that during Shelley’s lifetime male homosexuality was punishable by death. Therefore, when one encounters male love in Shelley’s writings, even as hints, one should know this took a lot of courage. In Italy, however, this was legal because of the Code Napoleon and the fact that men have traditionally gone to Italy to seek boy lovers. One of the reasons, Shelley sought refuge in Italy might be to seek a male companion, and he most certainly had love affairs with Byron and Williams.

Finally, despite the attempts of his family to alter his life and work, certain events from his life and his poems serve as evidence of how important male love was for Shelley who found inspiration for it in the homoerotic culture of Ancient Greece. This is best illustrated by Carpenter and Barnefield’s observation in the book *The psychology of the poet Shelley*:

“Since the whole weight of herd-suggestion actively fosters and encourages the expression of all feelings of love towards the opposite sex and actively represses any patently homosexual expression, one clear indication of the latter is worth more as evidence than a dozen conventional signs of the former.” (Carpenter and Barnefield’s, 2010, p. 59)

CONCLUSION This short outlook of Shelley’s life and publications shows his thorough knowledge, clear thought, and subtle artistry. It also portrays Shelley as a passionate idealist and consummate artist who stretched language to its limits in expressing both personal desire and social altruism while developing rational themes within traditional and somewhat boring poetic forms.

Unfortunately, the defects overcast his work too often. From time to time, they produce ambiguity and abstractions in which abundance of his unparalleled poetic sentiment sinks amid the fluency of words. This essentially faults Shelley's longer poems more than his short lyric poems in which exhilaration, rhythm and emotion are in a delicate equity of simplicity and perfection.

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МИРЈАНА Н. ЛОНЧАР-ВУЈНОВИЋ

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У ПРИШТИНИ СА ПРИВРЕМЕНИМ СЕДИШТЕМ
У КОСОВСКОЈ МИТРОВИЦИ, ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ
КАТЕДРА ЗА ЕНГЛЕСКИ ЈЕЗИК И КЊИЖЕВНОСТ

РЕЗИМЕ

ПЕРСИ БИШ ШЕЛИ: ЗАБОРАВЉЕНИ ГЕНИЈЕ

Перси Биш Шели (1792–1822) сматра се једним од најплоднијих писаца, али и најтрагичнијом иконом из доба романтизма у Енглеској. Његов живот и поезија су доказ ове тврдње јер су Шелијев оптимизам, великодушност, вера у човечанство, имагинација, љубав, слобода и убеђење у савршенство човека јединствени. Овај рад даје приказ Шелијевог живота, времена у коме је живео, критике, као и његових најпознатијих дела која су препознатљива по његовом невероватном, али у исто време заборављеном поетском генију.

Кључне речи: Перси Биш Шели; поезија; љубав; имагинација; слобода.



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